Sort office documents

3.2.3.1 Introduction to the learning outcome

This outcome describes the competencies required to sort office documents in an organization.

It involves determining the office document classification methods and systems, document sorting procedure and classification of documents as per the workplace policy.

3.2.3.2 Performance Standard

3.2.3.2.1 Office filing document classification methods and systems are determined as per work place policy.

3.2.3.2.2 Office filing documents are classified as per classification system.

3.2.3.3 Information Sheet

Definition of terms

Document classification: This is the act of labeling documents into categories according to their content. Document classification can be manual or automated and is used to easily sort and manage texts, images or videos.

Filing systems: *Filing systems* are decisions used to keep documents organized and easy to find for employees. A *filing system* is set up and employees follow the *system* being used.

Filing methods: These are the physical ways in which files are arranged and stored in the office.

Determining office document classification methods and systems

Classification of filing methods

Vertical filing

Vertical filing entails the **vertical position of the files**. The files are kept in a standing position under this method. In large scale organization, more papers are filed and there is a need of referring many papers. Hence, there is a possibility of time consuming in locating the papers.

The desired file should be referred without difficulty and in the shortest time.

The equipment of vertical filing consists of two parts.

a. **Folders**: Folder is the **basis for vertical filing**. Manila sheet or some other material is used with flexible substance. The folder is slightly higher than the front sheet. A brief description ofthe papers, letters or documents is written on the extended edge

CodsDigitalStore

of the folder. A **separate folder is maintained** for each correspondent, customer or subject matter. The papers relating to a correspondent or a subject are kept standing in chronological order or in other suitable order in the folder reserved for it. There is **no using of clip or holder** for fastening any document, papers or letters. Hence, there is no difficulty to refer the desired document or papers without disturbing others. In rare cases, clip may be used to keep the papers fastened together.

b. Cabinets: **Folders are kept vertically** in a steel or wooden cabinet. There are several drawers in a cabinet. The drawers are deep enough to hold the folders in a vertical position. Each drawer is fitted with a slider. The slider pushes the drawer backward can be opened and closed. Guide cards can be inserted at appropriate places in order to divide the drawer into convenient sections.

Advantages of Vertical Filing

1. The **files can be easily referred.**
2. There is **no disturbing of other papers** or letters than desired.
3. Insertion or withdrawal of any papers or letters is done without wastage of time and effort.
4. The **cost of folders is very cheap**. Hence, the **cost of maintenance is very low**.
6. **Minimum space is required** for keeping vertical filing.
7. There is plenty of room **for the expansion of filing** facility.
8. The drawers are locked after referring the desired files. Hence, the **safety and security of file are ensured**.
9. **Fire proof cabinets are used** to protect the files.
10. Vertical filing has much **flexibility**. The folders can be arranged in any kind of classification– alphabetically, numerically, subject wise and so on.
11. This system can be applied to file all types of papers and documents, orders, invoices, quotations, tenders, circulars etc. are to be **filed without difficulty**.

Disadvantages of Vertical Filing

1. The location of desired files **requires much time**.
2. The **files may wear and tear** resulting from the **slip down of folders**.

1. Digital filing

CodsDigitalStore

A digital filing system, serves the purpose of converting the more traditional filing systems, such as filing cabinets and stacks of folders, into a digital format that makes it easier to search for and store documents.

An electronic document management system is a way to streamline and automate manual processes of collecting and retrieving information. It has the following benefits:

a. Increase in employee productivity and satisfaction

One core benefit of digitizing your documentation is that it results in increased productivity at work.

Document management software allows multiple users to work on the same document at the same time. This way, every member stays updated about the changes made. Not only has that, but automated record tracking software also removed the need to distribute content via email.

The system permits you to make notes on the documents itself for your employees to see.

Besides, it displays the current status of the report; whether the file is approved, under review, or in its drafting stage.

b. Easy access to Files and Information

It allows you to customize your filing structure, meaning users can prioritize any information they may need regular access to. All your files remain sorted, and you can easily find information and knowledge from indexed content. It results in better and smart decision making and also reduces the amount of time lost for searching files.

Besides, the cloud document management system enables employees to access the document offsite.

It eliminates the need to carry data physically, and they can efficiently work remotely.

c.* It** creates ***a standard approach and better access control

The system allows one to restrict access to specific data and files to some users. As an admin, you can control the ability of an employee to view specific information based on their roles and requirements. It ensures that all your employees can find what they are supposed to, without straying into areas not designed for them.

CodsDigitalStore

A web-based document management system is one of the best ways to keep all your business confidential information hidden and safe.

d. Enhances security, data backup, and improves compliance

The cloud-based system automatically makes a backup of all files and documents. So even in case you accidentally delete an important file, you can restore it in no time. The cloud storage system protects your documents from any server loss as well.

Unlike paper documents, your digital records won't be destroyed in any natural calamity like floods or a human-made disaster like a fire. It is adequately secured in a cloud server, which can be accessed from anywhere from any device with an internet connection.

Furthermore, you can regularly check all the vital information for compliance with legal and industry regulations.

e. Integration with other systems increases efficiency

Another significant benefit of using digital document filing software is that it effortlessly integrates with many other management systems like accounting software, and more. The process eliminates the requirement to manually enter data, which reduces the chances of human error. Thus, it results in increased efficiency.

2. Horizontal filing

The Horizontal filing involves the horizontal position of files. The papers, documents and letters are kept in a horizontal or flat position in such a way that one on the top of another. The filing is made on date wise.

Horizontal filing types

a. **Flat Files**

A separate file is allotted to each customer or subject. The covers of files are made up of cardboard or thick paper. All the papers, documents or letters relating to the specified customer or subject are arranged in such a way that they are received as written. If any matter is required to more than one file then the required number of copies are taken for each file so that each concerned file can have a copy. The letters or papers are punched before filing. The metal hinges
of the file are then passed into these holes. In this way, papers are arranged in a chronological order.

CodsDigitalStore

The files are put one on top of the others and put in cupboards. The required files are found out very easily if the files are properly numbered and indexed. It is necessary to maintain movement of file register so that where about of file is easily find out. If a file is sent to any person or official, a sheet is kept in its place. An index can be prepared to know the files which are maintained in each cupboard and placed in the cupboard itself.

b. **Arch Lever Files**

This type of file has cardboard folders with metal arches. These arches are operated by a lever.

The filing papers can be punched with two holes. Then, the lever can be moved upward for opening of arches or springs. After the paper is inserted through the holes, lever is pressed down in order to close the springs. The papers lay one upon the other in file. This filing method is very simple to operate and economical also. The papers and letters are preserved very neatly. Any document can be referred without even removing the papers lying upon it.

Advantages of Horizontal Filing

1. It is simple to understand and operate.
2. The papers can be easily found out since they are filled in chronological order.
3. There is no chance of missing and misplacing of papers filed. The reason is that papers are fixed on the arch.
4. The documents can be referred to without removing them from the file.
5. The cost of maintenance of filing is very cheap.
6. The documents are maintained with free of dust.

Disadvantages of Horizontal Filing

1. The removing of any paper or letter is very difficult since the papers or letters are filed one on the other.
2. There is a need of more office space for maintenance.
3. The maintenance of an index is required in order to locate the desired file.
4. There is no chance for expansion.
5. It is not suitable for large organizations.

3. Lateral filing

Lateral files are identified by labels on the side edge of a file, and they're organized horizontally

CodsDigitalStore

rather than vertically. They don't always require drawers but instead can sit inside open shelving systems. Files are pulled in and out of the shelves by their edges. The cabinets come in a variety of sizes -- two-drawer to five-drawer models are available in 32-,36- and 42-inch lengths -- so you can choose the ones that best fit your needs. Two-drawer cabinets are perfect next to your desk, as they can extend your work space.

Advantages

- This makes it easy to store large numbers of files.
- It is easy to locate needed papers.
- Good for high-volume businesses.
- The long, wide top surface can be used for additional storage

Disadvantages

- One has to review the files from the side, which can mean maintaining a rather awkward stance.
- Files are bulky and difficult to move, especially if filled with paperwork.
- They can also be expensive and take up large amounts of floor space.

Classification of Filing Systems

It is essential to determine the nature of each and every document, sort them on a predetermined basis and then filed. Then only a document, which is needed for reference in future can be traced out and made available. The process of sorting out the document on some definite basis is called classification of filing.

Classification can be defined as the process of selecting headings under which documents are grouped or classified on the basis of certain common characteristics before filing takes place.

The efficiency, particularly, the accessibility of a filing system depends upon the care with which documents are classified. By classifying similar paper or papers belonging to a particular head or, office staff are able to trace out the paper or documents required at any time with minimum delay and trouble.

Managers, while designing a plan for filing department should also evolve suitable classification system. The decision regarding classification generally depends upon the purpose for which it is required.

Direct and Indirect Classification of files

CodsDigitalStore

Classification systems may be either direct or indirect. Direct filing means that the documents can be stored or retrieved without reference to an index. In an indirect system, indexing is necessary.

Filing systems

The files can be arranged on any one or more of the following basis:

1**. Alphabetical Classification of filing**

Alphabetical filing is the most widely used method. In this system of classification, the papers or records are classified in accordance with the first letter of the name in alphabetical order. For example, correspondence with those whose names or surnames begin with ***'A'*** will be classified and arranged together. If there are several names having the same first letter the arrangement takes into account the subsequent letters.

The main divisions of the alphabet can be further sub-divided and colour coding can be employed to facilitate selection and replacement of files. Alphabetical classification can be either by name or by subject or by geographical location.

Advantages of Alphabetical Filing

1. Most people are familiar with alphabetical filing. Hence, it is easy and simple to understand and operate.
2. It is self-indexing. No separate index is needed for alphabetical filing.
3. This system is highly elastic such that new headings can be introduced at any point without disturbing the classification.
4. Chances for misfiling are minimized.
5. There are useful provisions for miscellaneous papers.

Disadvantages of Alphabetical Classification

1. Alphabetical classification of filing is not always the fastest system as it takes a long time to find papers in large organizations.
2. Difficulties may arise through the misspelling of names.
3. In setting up a new system, it is difficult to estimate how much space is to be allowed for each letter of the alphabet.
4. Dead files removed from the system leave gaps, which cannot be filled except by correspondence bearing the same or a very similar name.
5. If the number of records increases, arrangements of guide cards and files became necessary.

CodsDigitalStore

In spite of these limitations, it is the most suitable method of filing inward and outward letters and other documents. Generally, there is a separate file for each letter in alphabet. However, in organizations two or three files are sufficient for all the 26 letters.

2. **Numerical Classification of files**

Each folder or record is given a number and the files are arranged in the numerical order. All papers relating to a particular customer or supplier or subject are placed in one folder bearing its distinctive number.

Folders are arranged in the cabinet numerical sequence and guide cards are used to divide them into suitable groups of 10 or 20. Thus, if a customer is allotted the number 14, all papers and documents connected with him will be found in folder number 14.

An Index will have to be maintained to facilitate location of and reference to a particular file.

Types of Numerical Classification

Numerical classification can be further divided into various categories, namely;

a. **Consecutive Classification System**

In this classification, folders or files are arranged in a strict numerical order from one onward.

Each folder is numbered and titled by subject or name and placed at the rear (back) of the existing folders.

b. **Dewey Decimal System**

This system is very popular in libraries. Under this method, each digit stands for a subclassification.

c. **Terminal Digit System**

Under this method, file numbers are in groups of two or three read from right to left each group representing a particular location or some other coding.

Advantages of Numerical Classification

1. Greater accuracy in filing is ensured. Hence, chances for misfiling are reduced to the minimum.

2. This system is highly flexible because it has unlimited scope for expansion.

CodsDigitalStore

3. There is no need for keeping miscellaneous files as in the case of alphabetical system.
4. Replacement of files shall be quicker and more certain.
5. Numbered files can be easily located.

Disadvantages of Numerical Classification

1. This system will operate efficiently only when there is an index. The index must be carefully managed and kept up-to-date.
2. Index should be referred before ascertaining the location of a file. This will cause delay in locating the files.
3. Since no miscellaneous files are kept it is not easy to arrange files for miscellaneous papers.
4. Errors in filing will result due to transposition of figures.

Geographical Classification

In this system files are arranged according to the location or addresses of the persons or parties to whom they relate.

The classification can be street-wise, town-wise, district-wise, state-wise or country-wise. This system will operate efficiently only when it is combined with either numerical system or alphabetical system.

This system of classification is generally followed in organizations engaged in export trade or doing business over a wide geographical area.

Advantages of Geographical Classification

1. Speedy location of files is possible.
2. It is simple to adopt.
3. Direct filing is possible.

Disadvantages of Geographical Classification

1. This system will work only when combined with alphabetical classification. Hence, it is not an independent system.
2. An index should be prepared; without index this system shall become inoperative.
3. Errors may result if the geographical knowledge of the filing clerk is poor. Hence, chances for misfiling will be more.
4. Proper training must be given to filing clerks. Otherwise, errors will become frequent.

4. **Subject-wise Classification**

CodsDigitalStore

Under this system, all documents concerned with a particular subject are brought together in one file. Such document may have come from different sources and from different people.

This system is adopted only when the subject or content of a letter is more important than the name of the correspondent. Each subject matter is kept in a separate file. These files may then be arranged alphabetically, numerically or on some other basis.

Advantages of Subject-wise Classification

1. Once the subject is known, it is very easy to trace out the required information.
2. Each subject file gives complete particulars and information on that subject.
3. There is scope for unlimited expansion.

Disadvantages of Subject-wise Classification

1. This system is not suitable for filing miscellaneous papers.
2. Its greatest drawback is that it is difficult to classify.
3. If the subject classification is not understood properly, it will become difficult to locate a document.
4. If the number of subjects is more, an elaborate index is necessary. This will make the system costly.
5. Liberal cross-references are often needed. This would make the system slow and time consuming.

5**. Chronological Classification**

Under this arrangement, records are filed in strict date order. Records like vouchers, invoices, and bills mostly connected with accounts are filed in this fashion.

The records must be classified according to their subject and may then be placed in date order inside the file related to that subject.

Merits of Chronological Filing System

1. Speedy location of records is possible.
2. Simple to operate.
3. Less expensive because ordinary files are sufficient to preserve the records under this system.

Demerits of Chronological Filing System

1. This system is suitable only for small business enterprises.
2. This system is not useful when exact dates are not known.

CodsDigitalStore

3. Incoming letters are separated from outgoing replies. Hence the history of particular transaction cannot be ascertained at a glance.

Combination of Various Methods

In practice, no single filing system is particularly suitable to all offices. More than one system can be combined to obtain speed and economy. Of them the most popular and effective system is the Alpha Numerical system which is a combination of numerical as well as alphabetical classification. Under this method, records are filed in alphabetical order, but under each alphabet, there are numbered folders.

Determining document classification methods

It is a fact that some methods, which are best for certain lines of work, would not be the best for others. It is therefore necessary that the right type of classification system be chosen. Each system should be examined with reference to certain important factors:

1. **Convenience**

Whatever system is selected; it should be convenient to the organization. Inconvenient methods should be avoided.

2. **Size**

The volume of transaction and the retention policy also affects the size of the filing system. If the number of records to be preserved is more, numerical systems should be used. For small concerns, alphabetical method seems to be more practical and natural because in all offices the staff members are more or less accustomed to the dictionary arrangement and grouping of words.

3. **Simplicity of the filing System**

Simple methods should be selected. Of the various methods, alphabetical method seems to be simpler. It is the best understood and perhaps is the generally used method in preference to some complex method, unless there are real advantages to be gained by adopting such a method.

4**. Speed**

Speed of reference is an important factor. Hence the system should be capable of locating the records as quickly as possible.

5. **Elasticity**

CodsDigitalStore

The system should be flexible enough to give scope for expansion. Numerical system is highly flexible than other systems.

6. **Accuracy**

Whatever system is selected, it should not provide for misfiling. If records are misfiled, quick location shall become impossible.

Sorting office records

Important Steps in an Office Filing Procedure

Filing procedure consists of a series of steps to be taken for the preservation and use of paper in an office. Filing procedure varies from organization to organization, according to the volume and complexity of the records and the service requirements. A carefully designed filing procedure is essential for all organizations.

The common steps found in organizations are given below:

1. **Order to File**

All documents need not be filed because all papers are not equally important. Hence, a one should decide whether the record in question is to be preserved or not. Therefore, no document should be filed unless the concerned official orders it to be filed. He should write the order, sign it and put the date. Only such documents should be filed. All unnecessary documents, therefore, shall not get accumulated in the folders.

2**. Preparation**

In preparing the record filing, the record clerk should read the paper and ascertain its filing classification. All related papers should also be attached to the main record. They should be stapled in the top left hand corner.

The papers should be then punched if they are to be fastened in files or folders. The record should be marked or indexed for classification with a colour pencil or by encircling key words or numbers on the record. If necessary, a cross-reference should also be made on the record.

3. Sorting and Filing

After coding, indexing and cross-referencing, the papers should be carefully filed in the correct classification. If necessary, the folders should be removed and opened flat and the latest record should be placed on the top.

4. Follow up Slip

CodsDigitalStore

Some documents require follow up action. The concerned officer should note the follow up instructions. The filing clerk should then prepare a follow up slip and should attach it to the relevant paper on files. An extra copy of such paper may be kept in the follow up file as a reminder so that the filing clerk can send the required paper to the concerned officer on the specified date.

5**. Retrieval**

Whenever any file is needed by the executive for any reference, it should be removed from the cabinet only when a written requisition is sent by him. On receipt of the requisition, the filing clerk should prepare an “Out guide” or out card.

A notation should be made on the out card as to the date of withdrawal, the name of the person who has withdrawn the file and the approximate date by which it should be returned. The out card is put in the place of the file on the document in the folder, which is removed till the file, or the paper is returned back.

The records should be periodically verified say once in two weeks or once in a month and a list of overdue records or files is prepared. Requests should also be sent to the concerned officials who are keeping the file to return them.

6**. Transfer Files**

The documents are kept in the file for some time according to the retention policy of the organization. After their active life is over, they may not be frequently needed. When the life of a document is permanently over and will no longer be required, it can be destroyed. However, certain documents may be alive but they may not be frequently required. Such files or folders or documents can be transferred and stored in a clean dust proof manner.

7. Retention

Some documents due to their legal requirements or active use should be retained for a long period. The management should therefore lay down a definite policy of records retention and destruction.

3.2.3.4 Activities

Practical Activities

You will carry out the following tasks in an institutional simulated environment while complying with industry practices and procedures as well as occupational, health and safety

practices.

CodsDigitalStore

1. Demonstrate understanding of organizational document sorting procedure.
2. Identify office filing document classification methods.
3. Identify office filing document classification systems.
4. Classify office documents for filing.
5. Sort office documents for filing.

Field Visit You will visit functional reception offices in the county offices: Complying with industry practices and procedures and with occupational, health and safety practices, you will perform the following tasks:

1. Demonstrate understanding of organizational document sorting procedure.
2. Identify office filing document classification methods.
3. Identify office filing document classification systems.
4. Classify office documents for filing.
5. Sort office documents for filing.

After the visit you will write a report on the practice of sorting office documents, challenges observed, their likely solutions.

NB During your field visit to an established reception office, you will be required to report to the station as an employee and perform duties allocated to you for the day(s). Your supervisor will provide a report on a template to be provided on your performance.

3.2.3.5 Self-Assessment

1. Explain steps one should follow during sorting of documents in an office
2. Describe the following four types of classification methods

Geographical classification

Chronological classification

Qualitative classification

Quantitative classification

3. Analyze filing classification system

3.2.3.6 Tools, Equipment, Supplies And Materials

- Computers
- Filing equipment

CodsDigitalStore

- Internet connectivity
- Registers
- Stationery
- External storage devices

3.2.3.7 References

Cox, Richard J. 2001. **Managing Records as Evidence and Information** Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books.

E. Barker, W. Barker, W. Burr, W. Polk, and M. Smid. 2012

N.A. Saleemi.1987. **Office Administration Simplified** Nairobi: N.A. Saleemi publishers.

William Saffady 2004. **Records and Information Management**: Fundamentals of Professional

Practice 3RD ED, ARMA International.

Recommendation for Key Management – Part 1: General.

https://web.archive.org/web/20070613200617/http://isp.imm.dtu.dk/thor/projects/multimedia/tex

tmining/node11.html

CodsDigitalStore